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TAGS: [ECON](#) [BEXP](#) [ELAB](#) [ENRG](#) [KSEP](#) [AMGT](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: NOMINATION FOR CORPORATE EXCELLENCE AWARD:
MICROSOFT OMAN

REF: STATE 47222

Summary

¶1. Embassy Muscat is pleased to nominate Microsoft Oman for the Secretary's 2007 Award for Corporate Excellence. Microsoft Oman's strong commitment to actively supporting government efforts to promote greater computer literacy in the Sultanate makes this company the right choice for the 2007 Corporate Excellence Award. End Summary.

Nascent Industry

¶2. Oman's information communications technology (ICT) sector currently is not well-developed. According to a Booz Allen Hamilton study commissioned by the Department under the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the industry overall employs only 1300 people, with most positions concentrated in a few large corporations. Compared to the population as a whole, the figure represents 0.4 IT employees per 1,000, which lags behind the EU-25 average of 5.5 IT employees per 1,000. Booz Allen Hamilton further estimated that the number of university students graduating from computer science disciplines reached only 386 in 2004.

Background: Government Focus on Raising IT

¶3. In an effort to boost public awareness of Oman's need to move increasingly toward a knowledge-based economy, the government launched its "E-Oman" campaign in 2006. Under the slogan "Transforming Oman, Empowering You," Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce and Industry, officially unveiled the government's plans regarding Oman's e-government programs, as well as other initiatives designed to promote Oman's transformation to a knowledge-based economy.

¶4. Under the direction of the recently created Information Technology Authority (ITA), the Omani government embarked on a pilot project electronically linking four ministries through one computer network, a plan that will eventually be expanded to include all ministries. In addition, the government is working on developing an electronic national registry system, smart ID cards for citizens and residents, and a one-stop-shop for business registration.

The Microsoft Partnership

¶5. In 2006, Microsoft concluded a three-year, five million USD per year agreement with the Omani government for the use of the company's licensed products on over 22,000 terminals. The contract, which includes a commitment by Microsoft to invest two million USD per year in training programs for government employees and the general public, represents the beginning of a valued relationship between the two entities as they both strive to improve computer literacy in the Sultanate.

¶6. As part of its plan to foster this relationship, Microsoft has committed to investing in Oman's IT capabilities. According to Microsoft country manager Abdullah al-Lootah, this commitment is essential to efforts to raise technology usage in government operations, which currently is very low. In terms of promoting knowledge transfer opportunities, Microsoft will sponsor six-month visits by government officials to the company's Dubai office to educate them on "best financial practices." Coupling with the government's E-Oman initiative, Microsoft is reaching out to the Omani people by installing computer laboratories in 10 schools for public use during the evening hours.

Training for the Future

¶7. Microsoft demonstrated its strong, continued commitment to building Oman's technical capabilities in March 2007, when the company concluded an agreement with the ITA to launch an innovation and support center to be housed at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), the government-run technology incubator. The agreement calls for a joint investment of six million USD in establishing the center, one million USD of which is to come

from Microsoft under its investment partnership accord with the Omani government. The center will host resident Microsoft engineers, who will train between 20 to 40 Omanis on technology solutions to deliver services to government entities under the "E-Oman" initiative. Graduates would then form IT steering committees within their respective ministries.

¶8. This initiative is one of several Microsoft is pursuing to "bridge the technology skills gap" in Oman. In addition to the innovation center, Microsoft will partner with Knowledge Oasis Muscat and other selected entities in training 300 Omani government professionals per year. The trainees will work with Microsoft engineers to develop and implement solutions to promote efficiency in delivering government services electronically. Salim al-Ruzaiqi, Chief Executive Officer of the ITA, praised Microsoft's efforts in the media, noting, "This new center will create more quality job opportunities for local Omani graduates in the ICT sector."

Assisting Women

¶9. Microsoft also has been active in supporting efforts to raise computer literacy among women through a partnership with MEPI's "Women in Technology (WIT)" program. The company is currently working with the Oman Women's Association in Muscat to train women throughout the Sultanate on IT skills. Under a "train the trainer" initiative, Microsoft donated its "Unlimited Potential" curriculum to the organization to allow participants to pass along skills taught by Microsoft trainers to women residing in the secondary cities of Oman. Microsoft further donated over \$50,000 worth of software and 90 refurbished computers to support the continuation of the initiative.

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